

Dr. Rahel Baffie(left) engages in dialogue



## NOT A ZERO-SUM GAME

### BRINGING TOGETHER ETHIOPIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES THROUGH DIALOGUE

Dr. Rahel Baffie has spent much of her life forging a career in politics.

From joining the Ethiopian Social Democratic Party in 1992, she has taken up the successive roles of Secretary, Vice-chair and Head of Finance and Admin within the party.

Today, as Vice-Chair of her party and Chair of the Ethiopian Political Parties' Joint Council, she is a strong advocate of multiparty dialogue as a way to make a difference to the lives of ordinary Ethiopians.

Dr. Rahel's drive to enter politics is fueled by the inequalities she saw around her in her childhood. She is from a region blessed with fertile ground, but in which she saw a serious lack of infrastructural investment.

This put a huge burden on the community, especially on women, who needed to carry heavy loads on their back and walk long hours to get water and go to the market.

Dr. Rahel also feels blessed to have had access to education as a child, unlike many others she grew up with. Aside from her political career, she has also gone on to achieve a PhD and set up a local NGO called "Safe Mother and Childhood" in her community.

That is why Dr. Rahel has dedicated time to politics. She believes that making the political system more effective and inclusive is an important first step towards opening up such opportunities for others.

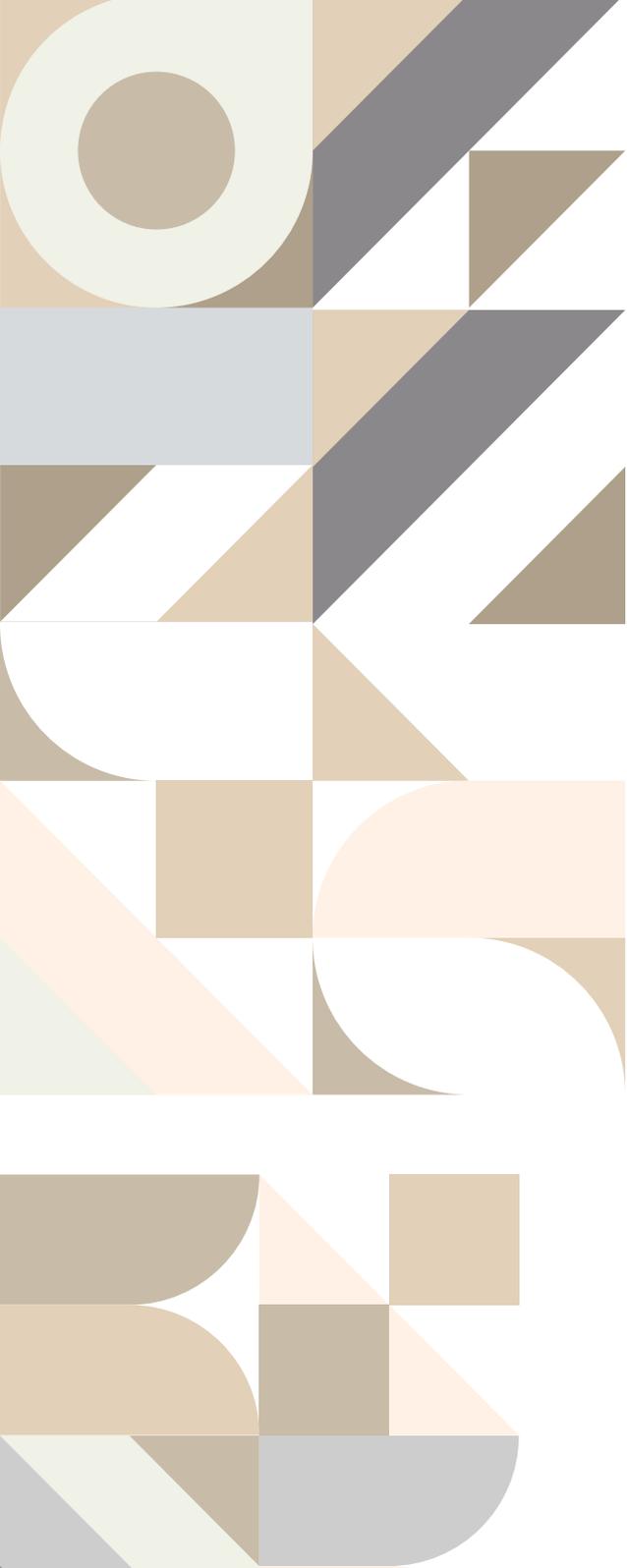
### A first experience with NIMD

Dr. Rahel first came into contact with NIMD when she went on an NIMD-organized exchange visit to Tunisia in 2017. There, she met inspiring women politicians from across the globe.

From these women, she heard stories of political success and hardship. Many of the politicians had faced harassment, imprisonment and even exile to have careers in politics.

*"It gave me a lot of encouragement to stick to my goals and not to give up."*

Upon returning to Ethiopia, and with a renewed drive to dedicate her life to politics, Dr. Rahel became involved in the Ethiopian Political Parties Dialogue (EPPD), facilitated by the National Election Board of Ethiopia.



The EPPD platform was supported by NIMD from January 2019 onwards. Our aim was to create a unique space where all political parties could come together to reach consensus on major political issues and push for reforms. At its core lies the conviction that real meaningful change can only be achieved by engaging with all parties.

More than 95% of Ethiopia's then 107 political parties and political groups took part in the dialogue with an equal voice.

### **A new way to engage in dialogue**

For Dr. Rahel, the chance to engage with all parties on national issues was eye opening. First, it changed her impression of the other political parties. She was able to listen to views from parties from across the political spectrum, and work closely with the others on a shared roadmap for the country.

Slowly, Dr. Rahel started to feel her preconceptions being challenged.

For example, she had gone into the dialogue expecting some parties to show resistance. But things could not have been more different. In fact, she and her colleagues were able to meet different party leaders and slowly got to know them on a personal level.

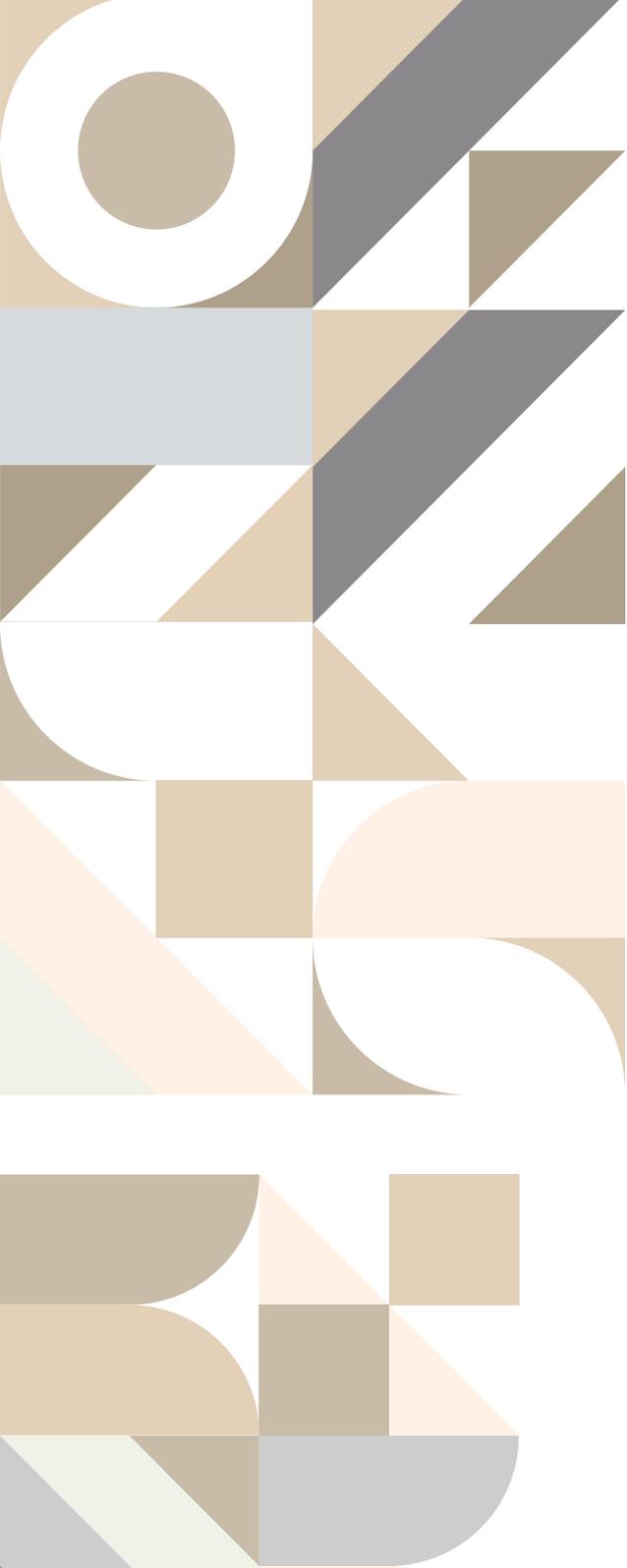
Gradually, they built a relationship of trust. When the mother of one party leader died, the participants went to his house to show they shared his pain. Not as political rivals, but as supportive colleagues.

So, Dr. Rahel started to forge trusting personal relationships with people she had previously seen as competitors. She saw how this change also made it easier to work together as political parties.

*“Rather than a competitive outlook, the parties now search for win-win solutions. And it no longer feels like a zero-sum game.”*

This change also had practical benefits for Dr. Rahel. She recalls that, before the dialogue platform, she and other political party members were very hesitant to exchange phone numbers. It had not occurred to her how easy it could be to meet and phone politicians from other political parties.

Now, her network has widened. She can pick up the phone and get information or advice from a whole network of politicians from across Ethiopia's political spectrum.



## Committing to an even playing field

The first big result of the dialogue platform came in March 2019. Through the inclusive dialogue and consensus building, all the participating parties were able to agree on a Code of Conduct, which sets out the rules of engagement for Ethiopian parties in the coming years.

Over 100 party leaders, including Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed of the ruling EPRDF (now the Prosperity Party), signed the Code of Conduct.

By signing, each party committed to supporting an even playing field, following the rules of the game and working together to further strengthen Ethiopia's political party system.

Dr. Rahel is proud of having been part of the dialogue on this Code of Conduct. While she recognizes that this is just the start of a long process, being able to work together with different parties on a joint vision brings her hope. There is power in collaboration, and by putting their political rivalries aside, parties will have more energy and resources to build joint legislation to support inclusion and equality in Ethiopia

## The EPPJC: A new body for arbitration and collaboration

The Code of Conduct was not the only result to come out of the dialogue. The parties also decided to set up a new Council together. The Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC) was directly established through the Code of Conduct.

This Council is tasked with supporting continuous dialogue on common political party issues and resolving their differences amicably. The EPPJC organizes long-term dialogue between parties, and even acts as an arbiter when issues come up between parties. By keeping this smooth collaboration going, the Council hopes to become a long-term platform for joint decision-making between parties.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, NIMD has provided technical, logistical and financial support to the Council. For example, we helped the EPPJC to set up a physical office, which is open to all political parties who are looking for assistance or help with arbitration.



## Taking forward the spirit of dialogue

Following her active participation in the dialogue and her party's signing of the Code of Conduct, Dr. Rahel was elected as Chair of the EPPJC in January 2021.

She believes her work with NIMD and her dedication to collaboration prepared her for this position:

*"If they had given me this position in 2015, I would not have been able to put myself in the shoes of the other parties. This change makes me more confident now to take up this role and serve all political parties equally."*

She is excited to take the EPPJC forward, and use her skills and experience to promote and strengthen multiparty cooperation.

And, ultimately, for Dr. Rahel, the future has no limits.

*"I want to be the first female Prime Minister of Ethiopia, because I want to break the political culture of "yegulbet hail" (power/force and zero-sum game) and move towards a culture where political parties engage in dialogue and compete in elections based on ideas to solve Ethiopia's problems."*

As a powerful and experienced politician, Dr. Rahel feels equipped to lead this change. At NIMD, we are excited to support her and the EPPJC as they continue to strengthen collaboration and trust between Ethiopia's parties.



## TOWARDS ELECTORAL REFORM IN HONDURAS: A TIMELINE

Electoral reforms are deeply needed in Honduras.

In both 2013 and 2017, elections in the country were tainted by concerns of fraud, violent intimidation and widespread irregularities. Following the 2017 elections, violent protests and a crackdown by security forces led to the deaths of 22 civilians and one police officer.

But there is hope for change in Honduras. New electoral organizations and electoral reforms could hold the key to more inclusive, transparent and representative elections.

A process which improves people's trust in elections will reduce feelings of marginalization from the politics. And inclusive reforms could make it more possible for politically under-represented groups to get involved.

NIMD has been working with electoral institutions since 2016. We are engaged in a long-term process to help to prepare Honduras's institutions for much-needed reforms.

By supporting and upholding electoral reforms, we hope to contribute to their success. But more than that, we have been working directly with new electoral institutions to help them become stronger, more effective and more transparent. This is in line with the recommendations of the Electoral Observation Missions (EOM) of the EU and the Organization of American States.

### Setting the scene for electoral reform

NIMD's work towards electoral reform started in 2016. As the country started to contemplate the need to strengthen electoral institutions, NIMD Honduras made steps to create a favourable environment for this process. We held bilateral meetings with both electoral institutions and political parties, as well as trainings to empower political actors to enact electoral legislation and reform proposals.

The importance of this work became clear in the lead-up to the 2017 elections. Voter irregularities in the primary elections give rise to a national debate on the effectiveness of the national ID card and the National Registry of Persons.

The elections themselves made the need for reform even clearer. The decision of Honduras's Judicial power to allow for the re-election of Juan Orlando Hernández despite a

Constitutional ban caused a lack of trust among the electorate. The elections were tarnished by irregularities, electoral violence and unrest.

Calls for profound electoral reforms were made by civil society, the churches and the international community.

Between 2017 and 2019, as a result of these calls and NIMD's lobby efforts, three new electoral bodies were established: the Clean Politics Unit (2017), the Electoral Court (2019) and the National Electoral Court (2019).

This is when our work with electoral bodies in Honduras began in earnest.

Since 2017, we have provided the new electoral bodies with support and guidance in their path to become strong, trusted and effective organizations. We have also helped existing electoral bodies to restructure and increase their effectiveness.



## CONTEXT IN HONDURAS

### We support:

- Clean Politics Unit
- Electoral Court
- National Electoral Council
- National Registry of Persons
- National Congress (support on electoral and political party reform)

The National Register of Persons introduces a new, more effective biometric ID card for voters. This provides a much clearer system for voting and registration, which will reduce voter irregularities in future.

Congress approves a law requiring electoral lists to have gender parity and alternation of men and women candidates.

This means that men can no longer hold all the top positions on party lists.

In the 2021 primaries, the number of women in eligible positions rose from 21% to 28%.

2021 general elections loom

The National Congress's Technical Committee submits the new draft Electoral Law to Congress.

The law includes reforms to increase inclusion, transparency and trust in Honduras's elections.

228 of the 318 articles have been approved.

We hope the remaining articles will be approved by this May, ahead of the elections in November.

2017-2020

2018-2020

2020

2020-2021

**NIMD provides technical, financial and logistical support to new and existing electoral institutions and helps them to become stronger and more effective.**

**We support each body to develop Communications and Visibility Strategies; increase their transparency and visibility; and foster public trust.**

NIMD gives training and supports the National Register on how to roll out the new ID card.

We also help the Register to evaluate and reform its internal systems and procedures.

Together with the Electoral Court, NIMD launches a campaign to encourage political parties to include under-represented groups on their electoral lists.

**NIMD supports this by:**

- Working with the Forum for Women in Politics to develop the proposal.
- Supporting the Commission of Gender Equality through dialogue and capacity building.

NIMD supports the National Congress's Technical Committee – a multiparty group tasked with developing the bill for the new Electoral Law.

As part of this, we submit an analysis of the current electoral legislation, including recommendations.

We work with political parties to support the approval of the law.

**Changes include:**

- Reinforcement of the gender quota.
- Changes to financing for political parties.
- Fairer registration for political parties.

**NIMD continues to support the debate on the outstanding articles.**

**We run awareness-raising campaigns on the elections and reach out to political parties to test/influence their approval of the bill.**

## NIMD CONTRIBUTION

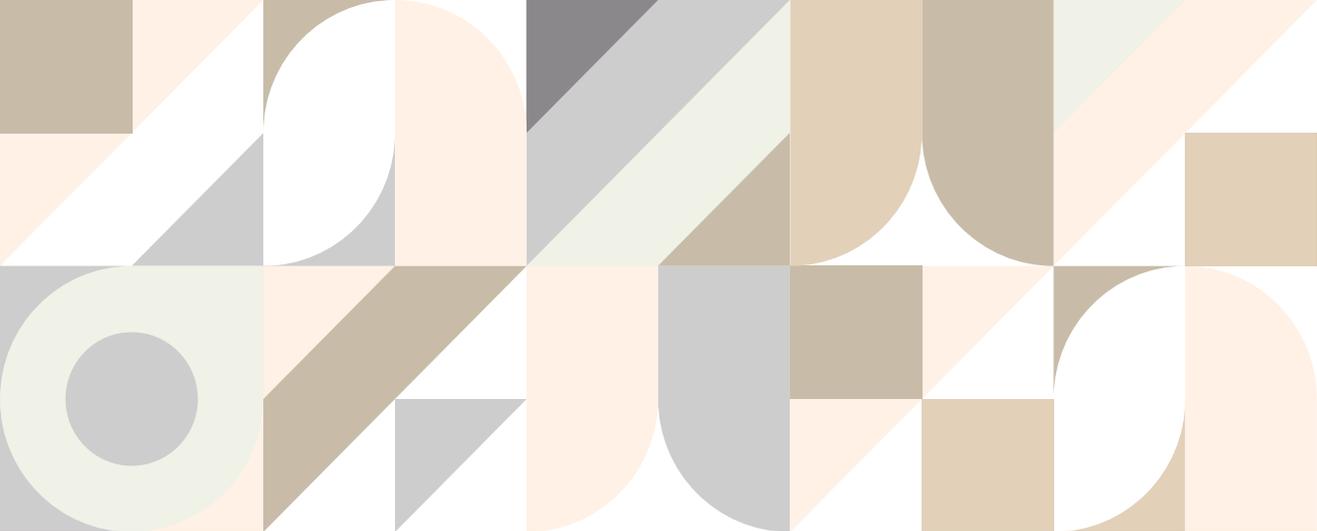
### 2021 onward

In 2021, general elections will take place. Not all the problems of the past have been resolved. Designing new institutions is one step, but it takes time for them to become organized and operational.

But a lot has been achieved since 2016. Honduras will enter the 2021 elections with new and strengthened electoral institutions. And there is strong hope that the new electoral legislation will also be in place.

In addition, there are new mechanisms to ensure more women have access to politics. There is a new ID and registration system to help keep track of who has voted. And the new electoral bodies, formed between 2017 and 2019, have a strong basis. They have made their first steps towards more transparency and inclusion in Honduras's elections. These developments have the potential to start the process of

re-establishing trust in elections. The achievements we have made are part of this longer process, towards more inclusive, transparent and representative elections in Honduras. Therefore, NIMD is set to continue to support the electoral organizations and facilitate debate between political parties, and between political actors and civil society, on outstanding electoral reform for inclusive democracy.



# EL SALVADOR

## The Democracy School for people living with disabilities



Gabriela Escalante is a resilient and optimistic person. She believes strongly that it is her responsibility to grow as a person and contribute to her community.

It's a conviction that has grown with her through her childhood and early years. As a person living with a disability, Gabriela found parts of her childhood complicated. In certain stages of her schooling, she felt marginalized by some teachers, headteachers and other children.

But she is also grateful for the good people who helped her through these difficulties: her family but also the other children who, despite being very young at the time, pushed Gabriela to believe in herself and break down the barriers around her.

She understood from these people that she had no limits. That she would not be defined by the labels that people may use to categorize her.

She has carried this mindset with her into her adult life.

### The Democracy School for people living with disabilities

In 2019, Gabriela took part in our first ever edition of the Democracy School for people living with disabilities in El Salvador. It's a programme that we run in coordination with the *Fundación Red de Sobrevivientes y Personas con Discapacidad* (Network Foundation of survivors and people with disabilities), the *Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho* (Foundation of studies for legal implementation) and IM Swedish Development Partner.

The School for people living with disabilities is just one of NIMD's Democracy School courses in El Salvador, where both established and aspiring politicians come together and learn democratic values. By teaching established and future leaders skills such as how to speak, listen and debate with mutual respect, we help the next generation to put their political values into practice in line with needs of their country.

Our school for people living with disabilities also aims to empower a group of people who may face barriers to political participation. By providing a space where they can build a network of people from across the political spectrum, and the chance to pick up new knowledge and skills, we hope to help the participants to break down these barriers.



It was exactly these objectives which motivated Gabriela to sign up for the school. In addition, she was intrigued to try something new. She had never thought about becoming involved in politics before. But it was something that fitted in well with her drive to learn and grow, and contribute to her society.

## Joining the Democracy School

On the first day of training, Gabriela found herself surrounded by other participants, all eager to learn but cautious.

*"Everyone was a bit inhibited at the start. We didn't know what to expect, or what to think."*

But slowly the atmosphere started to change. And Gabriela's confidence grew.

She recalls the knowledge and skills that she learned through the training. Along with the other participants, she explored the political system, identified the different entry points, and honed many practical skills. Through this training, she remembers gaining the confidence to listen, handle a subject, direct her ideas and inspire trust.

*"By the end, we realized we have really good ideas. We realized that our age and physical or mental condition do not influence our ability to make our voices heard, or make an impact in our societies."*

Gabriela has seen this change filter into other parts of her life. For her, the most noticeable change, which even her family has commented on, is that she feels empowered. She feels more confident to voice her opinion, but she also has more patience to listen to and understand others.

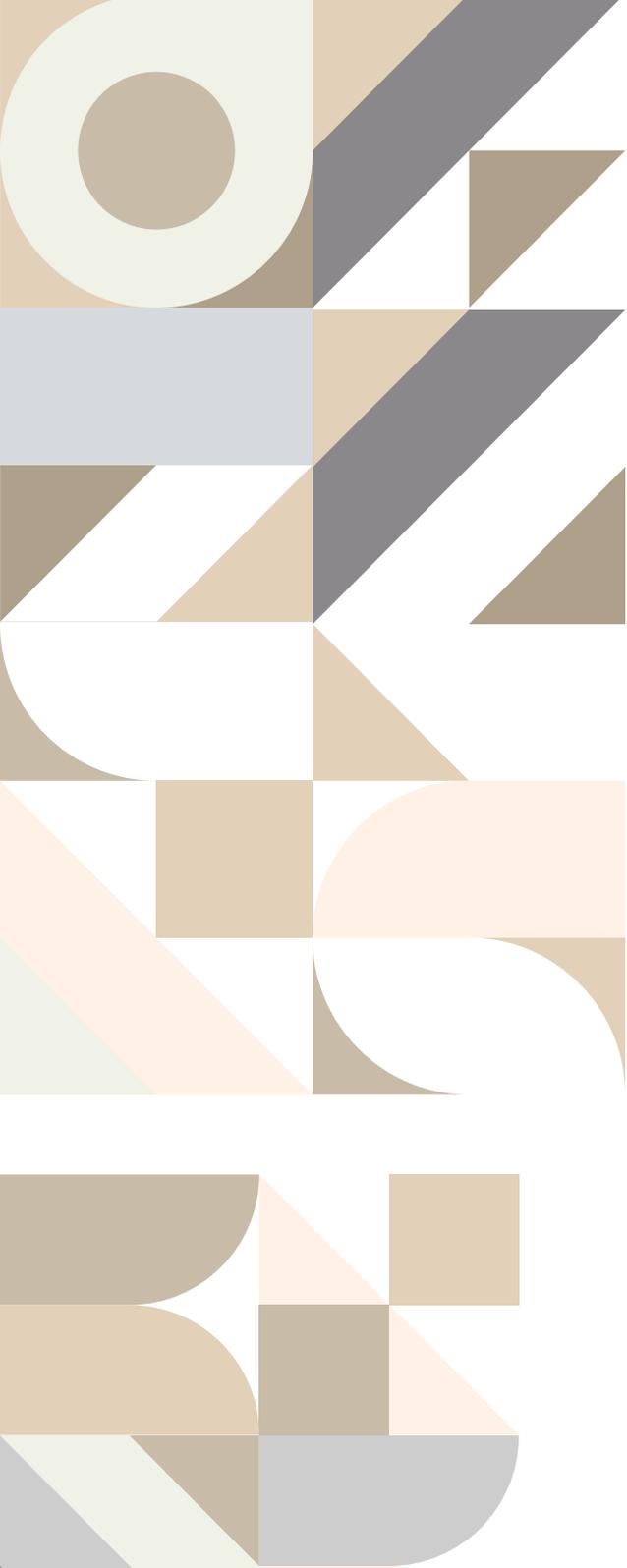
*"I think we all knew ourselves a bit better by the end of the school".*

## The second edition

Based on her positive experience, Gabriela – along with many of her fellow participants – decided to take part in the second edition of the Democracy School.

There were times when this course was challenging, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gabriela had to get up early to arrange her internet access, which was often unstable, and organize her time to meet the online nature of the course. But she also saw great value in being able to continue building her relationship with her new network in this online setting.

She describes the course as a deepening of her knowledge, giving her the chance to not only understand the political landscape, but also start to put her learning into practice, and understand how to contribute to her community.



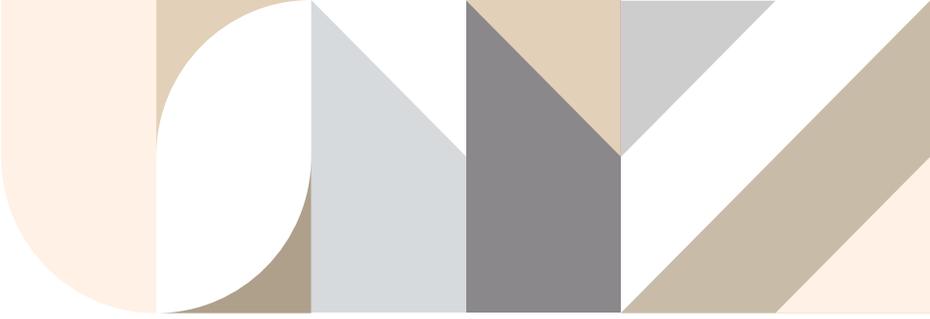
## Supporting other young people with disabilities

This knowledge has led to concrete results.

Alongside a group of other young people from the course, Gabriela decided to create an association to help and support young people living with disabilities, and their families.

It was based on a realization by many participants during the Democracy School training: that they had previously been unaware of the government entities responsible for protecting their rights, and how to access this protection. The participants decided to form the association as a linking pin between young people with disabilities and the resources available to them.

But more than that, each participant also uses their unique set of skills to provide extra support. A huge diversity of professionals took part in the school. From lawyers, to journalists to psychologists and athletes. This allows for a wide spectrum of support: Gabriela can provide guidance on health and prosthetics, for example, and another participants gives legal guidance.



The participants hope that, by being present and visible they can also set an example. They can show other people with disabilities that there are no limits; that they can also have the career they want; and that there are people who believe in them and support them.

*“The Democracy School course gave us the foundation on which we have built our association. It allowed us to open up our options beyond what we had considered in the past.”*

Gabriela hopes to these people some of the opportunities that the Democracy School gave her. And she has big plans for the future.

*“Now, I believe that I can do anything. I can build my career; I can have a decision-making role. And, one day, I can look out for people with disabilities, and the population in general, from within the Legislative Assembly.”*

Indeed, Gabriela's personal ambition is to be elected to Parliament. She feels the course has given her the tools to have more of an influence in politics and enter decision-making spaces.

*“We only needed someone to believe in us. And NIMD and its partners did that. They told us ‘you are part of society, you can participate, you must participate’.”*